DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 128 859 CS 501 491

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TITLE Videology: Space and Time in Political Television.
PUB DATE Aug 75
NOTE 17p.; Reprint from the 1975 Pennsylvania Speech Communication Annual

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Commercial Television; *Journalism; *News Reporting; Politics; *Rhetorical Criticism
IDENTIFIERS *Broadcast Journalism

ABSTRACT

After an analysis of television coverage of political conventions, the author contends that television journalism, though not consciously biased, emphasizes the present at the expense of the past, concentrates on nominees instead of on policies, and uses gossip and rumor as hard news to heighten the drama surrounding the emergence of a new leader. A plan is proposed to modify current television reporting of political conventions and similar events to restore to American politics a sense of historical context and to emphasize the legitimacy of rhetorical conflict. This would be done through the use of a series of prepackaged and self-contained miniature documentaries which could be broadcast at short notice to clarify, or add perspective to, points that arise during the proceedings. (AA)

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Videology: Space and Time in Political Television

Thomas W. Benson*

On November 13, 1969, in a speech before the Mid-West Regional Republican Committee in Des Moines, Iowa, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew charged that "a small group of men, numbering perhaps no more than a dozen anchormen, commentators, and executive producers, settle upon the 20 minutes or so of film and commentary that is to reach the public."[1] Too often, according to Agnew, these men reveal their biases in slander of the President and in suppression of the normal in favor of conflict, dissent, and radicalism. "Gresham's Law seems to be operating in the network news. Bad news drives out good news. The irrational is more controversial than the rational. Concurrence can no longer compete with dissent."[2] Agnew proposed that "the people can let the networks know they want their news straight and objective."[3] Agnew called for a broad public questioning of the networks by the people, and in retrospect, marked the beginning of an apparent campaign by the Nixon administration to punish the press.

Most communication scholars, including me, can be depended upon to deplore the government's attacks on freedom of information. Most recently such attacks have been evident in dark warnings about network news coverage; in attempts to separate local affiliates from network control, thereby replacing the network news broadcasts with a broadcast equivalent of the wire services' relation to local papers; in judicial assaults on the privacy of reporters' notes and film outtakes; and in a general program of government secrecy. Of course we all know the networks make so much money that they can hardly gobble up publishing houses, baseball teams, and other businesses fast enough to unload their enormous profits.[4] We have learned to respond with skeptical, but on balance sympathetic, murmurs when network presidents, presiding over empires built on violence, soap operas, and deodorant commercials scold congressional committees about the sanctity of freedom of expression in the scheme of American values. And when a television news anchorman gives a speech

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CS 501 491

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telling television's critics to shut up or offer constructive alternatives, we may overlook the relevance of a comment he made after an interview with a harried and indignant public official the night before last, reminding us that his questions contained no personal malice and that those who work in public must be prepared to accept criticism.

My own myth of network news comes from pre-school memories of CBS radio correspondents reporting World War II. These men were heroic, incorruptible, and infallible. Myths die hard, to be replaced by other myths, perhaps. I have come to believe that in news broadcasting, competition has bred sameness and government pressure has created a shallow and disagreeable compromise with error that calls itself balance in the name of professional journalism. In a dangerous market, format is the refuge to which broadcasters have fled. The tremendous competition for advertising revenues breeds not variety but equivalency. Television programming, both in content and in scheduling, is dominated by a limited set of recognizable categories (news, variety, situation comedy, cartoons, soap operas, games, sports) doled out in half-hour packages and punctuated by commercials. One of television broadcasting's major paradoxes is that in a medium where time is precious and the pace frantic, repetition is the rule. Format becomes a powerfully motivating force shaping our audio-visual access to others and one another, just as format to a large degree determines how scholars can communicate with one another through the medium of an academic journal, where discovery and criticism too often give way to an endless and conventional replication of the myths of the academic disciplines.

In 1970 the National Developmental Project on Rhetoric encouraged rhetorical scholars to examine forms of communication other than public address, and mentioned, among priority areas for investigation, "the rhetorical nature of such forms as television news and editorial programs."[5] This paper is a narrative and a speculation, from the perspective of rhetorical and media theory, about network television coverage of political conventions.

What follows is not an objective description but an interpretation. It is offered not as absolute truth but as a critical view. The essay is written in the first person because that is the way I reached my present opinions, and because the reader needs to be reminded that the interpretations advanced here, even when hotly defended, are tentative and personal. I have been less inter-

ested in the truth about political conventions than in the way those conventions look on television. To cloak my interpretations in neutral prose would be to adopt the same mystifying camouflage I am objecting to in the television networks.

I

Standard television coverage of party nominating conventions serves the public in a variety of ways. It emphasizes the centrality of policy and of political decisions in all aspects of national life. It mediates between political leaders and the public, thereby removing direct control over information from the hands of political leaders. It provides vital insights into the sorts of people and interests that make up our society. And by making public a decision making process it provides a virtual public participation in the decisions reached. But all of these services are provided at a risk which arises from the very nature of broadcast journalism.

The television journalist is prompted by his own professional training and by a wish to insure his network against charges of bias to treat what is largely a pseudo-event as if it were a hard-news story.[6] A political convention is elaborately prearranged and its conclusions usually foreordained. But the myth of hard news leads the news team to treat the convention as the story "who gets nominated?" The journalists themselves realize that from their point of view what is important is not merely who gets nominated, since the choices are at best narrow and at worst predictable before the convention ever begins. But there are ratings to consider, as well as hard news formats. If what really mattered were covering who gets the nomination, the networks would not need continuous coverage. On the other hand, having decided to provide continuous coverage, the networks feel forced to maintain the myth of journalistic news gathering. The newsman and his network face a dilemma: What matters in the event as a spectacle and as a communicated process is not simply who gets nominated but what sorts of political decisions are being made, and what they reveal about our public life, across the whole country, in our past and future. We need to know how the convention mirrors the continuity of American history, and what it means for future policy. The dilemma arises just here. "Interpretation" would lay the network open to the charge of an unprofessional loss of objectivity. But a straight analysis of the hard news of the nomination itself would, they seem to reason, be crushingly boring. The standard solution? Artificially crank up the drama by emphasizing the uncertainty and the conflict in the process. Several journalistic consequences follow.

First, in masquerading as hard-news journalism, the coverage concentrates upon the importance of nominees as opposed to policies. A political convention is in part a religious spectacle, in part an occasion for decision-making. As religious spectacle, the event magnifies the importance of our quadrennial search for a leader who will resolve the gathering contradictions that erupt and then are transcended in the moment of nomination.[7] To suppose that a leader will solve our problems, and to focus our symbolic resources on choosing such a leader every four years, is a form of what Kenneth Burke calls "secular prayer," much like proposing "that Congress pass a law against bad weather."[8] The depiction of a mass rescued by a leader has already been deminitively captured on film, in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, the official documentary of Hitler's 1936 Nurenberg party rallies. In *Triumph of the Will* we see cinema's affinity for masses acting in unison, and we are reminded that the television commentators' contempt for the sham debate of political conventions may boomerang: it may appear to be contempt for debate itself, and, because of the sheer power of the spectacle, promote the search for a leader who will signal the end of internal division. Such a vision of leadership is implicitly authoritarian.

Second, disagreement is talked about as a hollow pose or, more frequently, as an illegitimate state of near-war. Debates are dramatized into "floor-fights" rather than reported as the normal democratic alternative to violent conflict. As Duncan says, American democracy needs a "model of action which *normalizes* disagreement, rivalry, competition, and conflict."[9]

Third, the temporal form of the television coverage works in the present tense. Focus on the present and the immediate past as they point toward the future is consistent with the best standards of television journalism, but it obscures the larger perspective of American history that legitimizes and gives order to the process. If the camera never left the podium, television's preference for the present tense would not be such a problem, because the ongoing debate, both in its form and in its content, would — if often hypocritically — reinforce the continuity of the political process. But once the network has decided to cut freely away from the "official" convention, it has begun a process of interpretation which, in its present form, emphasizes the present at the expense of the past. The present becomes a disconnected fragment rather than an historical moment.

Fourth, gossip becomes the best available montage element. When a decision is made to cut away from the platform, for

anything other than a commercial, the cut is to the anchor booth, a delegate in a hallway, a candidate in a caucus room, or a breathless correspondent on the floor. Gossip and rumor become hard news and heighten the drama and mystery surrounding the emergence of a new leader.

Fifth, the concentration on looking for a winner leads to a magnification of computer analysis often interesting and accurate, but hardly a corrective for the other ills of the format. The computer promotes the fantasy that what is happening is factual and that technological means will enable us to predict and control it. A technological society is likely to fall victim to its own metaphors. We come to believe that a "problem" implies a "solution" which will work if only the society can act upon the problem with efficiency and unanimity, under the guidance of a leader in whom we can have "faith."

II

I worked out the analysis of convention coverage described above after the 1968 conventions and by 1971 I had developed a series of proposals that addressed each of the difficulties, not without inviting difficulties of their own. At first I regarded my plans as of purely speculative, theoretical value, but several students and colleagues urged me to pass them along to the networks. And the networks themselves, under attack from the administration and large segments of the public, had often enough responded by saying that they needed constructive suggestions for improvement, not mere carping. And so I did what I could to offer my plans to the networks. Before I describe the proposal I had developed, let me briefly describe my contacts with the networks.

I suppose, in retrospect, that I was naive to imagine that I had merely to offer my services for them to be welcomed. At the suggestion of some television executives (the friends of friends) I first wrote to Walter Cronkite, Robert Wood, and Richard Salant of the Coumbia Broadcasting System on February 18, 1971. Wood, President of the CBS Network, passed his letter on to Salant, President of CBS News. My letter outlined the analysis described above and requested an appointment to discuss alternative presentational formats. Cronkite replied that he had passed my letter along to Gordon Manning, Vice President and Director of News for CBS News. Manning replied on February 24. I quote his letter in its entirety:

Dear Mr. Benson,

Walter Cronkite has passed on to me your letter of February 18. I thank you for your interest in CBS News' convention coverage, and your offer to give us proposals in this regard. Our convention coverage is planned and executed by an internal CBS News unit, and while we haven't got a monopoly on all the good ideas in the world, our budget and our policy both dictate that this work be planned and executed internally.

Sincerely,
(signed) G. Manning

A few more phone calls and I gathered for another approach to CBS, armed with the advice of a CBS News correspondent, who asked me to withhold his name. At his suggestion, I wrote to Martin Plissner of the CBS News Election Unit, to Robert Wussler, Director of Special Events for CBS News, and to Joan Richman, his assistant. On March 22, 1971, Wussler sent me the following letter:

Dear Mr. Benson:

I have received your letter to me of March 14 and also your note to Mr. Salant dated February 18 dealing with the same subject.

I am in the process of reviewing your proposal and as soon as we have some specific details on the matter, we will contact you further. In general, let me add that this type of programming concept is reserved for in-house origination. However, you will be hearing from us.

Thank you for your interest in CBS News.

Yours very truly,
(signed) Robert Wussler

That was the last I heard from CBS News. In May 7, 1971 I wrote to NBC and ABC, again offering an analysis and requesting an opportunity to suggest a series of program modifications.

Donald Meaney, Vice President of NBC News, replied to my letter on June 3. His was the longest reply I had received yet. but not much more open to my offer.

Dear Professor Benson:

I appreciate your taking the time to write, offering us your suggestions on how we may alter our coverage

of the 1972 political conventions. I do not agree with your fundamental premise, however. I do not think that we deal entirely in "hard objective news" and treat the conventions as the story purely of "who gets nominated." We regard the conventions as a great American experience and bring to our public all of the events surrounding the process of choosing the candidates for whom they will have the opportunity to vote. We do believe, though, that the coverage is of these events not the background, outside interpretive or otherwise related material. The events may be on the convention floor, just off it, elsewhere in the convention city, or some place else in the United States. But it is always one of the associated events.

As for interpretation, it is provided amply through our team of long experienced, highly competent correspondents, both in their own observations and in their extensive continuing contact with the participants.

In not seeking further outside approaches, such as you proffer, we are not being complacent or resting on our laurels. What we do is a product of many years of evolution, that continues with each convention. I do, however, appreciate your writing.

Sincerely,
(signed) Donald Meaney

What I had come to, then, was that CBS and NBC, as a matter of policy, would not even listen to outside suggestions as to program modification. ABC never replied to my letter.[10]

The networks probably have what seem to them good reasons for avoiding outside suggestions. Suppose they listened to me and then found I was proposing an idea already developed by them? Presumably I would begin illegitimate copyright disputes, or try to hold the network up for compensation. And with all the unprofessional crackpots, intellectuals, and artists on the loose, the networks must get lots of mail suggesting what to broadcast. Certainly, they must reason, they cannot listen to it all. And temperamentally, the network staff is inclined to think of itself as an elite, and is reluctant to see outside offers as anything but crankish or critical attacks on the best efforts of the country's most talented and highly paid broadcasters.

Whatever the cause, broadcasters seem to have closed themselves off from new ideas as a matter of general policy. If so, the networks must share the blame for the present turmoil

which seeks new relationships among broadcast journalism's needs for autonomy, accessibility, competition, and responsibility. The press serves the public best when it is in the main free from public pressure to inhibit its inquiries; but when the channels are limited as severely as in the area of television journalism, public claims to access must not be lumped into the same category as pressures to muzzle the news media. It is possible to deplore television's ignorance, avarice, cowardice, and pride without joining the White House invasion of freedom of the press. We need more television news, not less, and we desperately need formats which will provide intensive and comprehensive information on public affairs.

The original proposal for a series of changes in network coverage never did get before the networks. I offer it here for its possible value as a speculative venture, which was its intention in the first place.

III

The proposal I hoped to put before one of the networks in 1971 was simple enough, though a departure from established formats. I reasoned that although the outcome of a political convention might be in doubt, its format and even content were to a large extent predictable. Committee meetings, caucuses, debates, speeches, the arrival of delegates and candidates, balloting, parliamentary maneuvering—all could be fairly well anticipated. The predictability of format would make possible the preparation *before* the convention even began of a large repertory of pre-packaged and self-contained miniature documentaries—a set of audio-visual modules that could be put on the air on short notice to clarify any point that arose during the ongoing proceedings. The packages, or modules, which could conveniently be stored on individual video cassettes, film clips, or on longer, coded reels, would be set up so as to be instantly accessible.[1] They would seldom run more than a minute or two, but would run the gamut from a single still picture through short, silent clips to four or five-minute documentaries. For a political convention there might be from two to three hundred separate items, not counting a larger set of still pictures, and these would be added to as the convention proceeded. I am assuming that present convention format, with anchor booth, floor reporters, and so on would be retained, and that the modules described here would be an added montage element.

What would be recorded on these packages? Most of the materials would be "historical" in nature. A team of researchers

would comb through network and other archives to find footage of people and events which might later be needed as part of the montage plan at the convention. In addition, film crews would record interviews of two types: "expository" interviews with experts on points of policy or procedure that might require explanation during the convention, and "news" interviews with convention participants—delegates, managers, candidates, and son—also on matters related to policy and procedure.

Obviously, *what* is put on the recorded modules would depend on *why* and *how* they were to be used. A description of why the modules are to be used is also a description of their advantages. Such a description begins with the most modest claims and moves toward the most ambitious—and most controversial.

At the very least, the plan proposed here would add both interest and clarity to present convention programming. When the anchorman refers to Franklin Roosevelt, it would be possible to fill the screen with FDR's picture, or project it behind the anchorman, or cut to a brief sound film of FDR. When it is necessary to compare voting patterns of 1968 with 1972, a chart or series of charts would be ready to put on the screen. At this level of use, the modules would be available to give visual reinforcement to verbal references, taking advantage of television's capacity to clarify and add interest through graphic illustration. Such a plan would give the program director someplace to cut to in moments of boredom or confusion, and the whole thing would be as simple to operate as cutting to a commercial. And, besides helping to boost ratings, it would be a way of making use of the capital invested in network archives at a very modest cost. It is reasonable to suppose that archival research can anticipate the later needs of the convention reporting team because a convention is, structurally, a highly predictable event.

An even more modest use of the archival plan suggests itself. At various points during the reporting day, a reporter assigned to the task could narrate a miniature documentary on how the day's events compare to the history of conventions and the issues and men involved. In this plan the reporter would in effect have his own special feature, rather than integrating the archival material with the ongoing convention.

A slightly more ambitious use of the modular plan involves a conscious attempt to analyze and interpret, to offer the American public expanded grounds upon which to compare, evaluate, and choose. Current coverage of conventions is not only occasionally boring or confusing: it can be downright cynical.[12] Without

sacrificing its objectivity or even its healthy skepticism, a network with instant access to archival materials could do much to place an ongoing political convention into historical context. The assumption here is that a natural side effect of showing how conventions work, and have worked in the past as part of a complex apparatus of policy and power, would be the opportunity for the viewing public to develop some sense of the legitimacy of competitive decision making. A political convention is part of a system designed to make choices, and to ratify a series of choices made in a long series of primaries, state conventions, and so on. If a network could place the convention in historical context, especially if the context were analyzed by both historians and rhetorical scholars, a real public service might be performed without ever departing from journalistic standards of objectivity. All that would be changed would be that a convention could be visualized as part of a process of history—a process that can be recalled to the screen at appropriate moments during the convention. The convention might then emerge not simply as a cynical jostling for power, or a heated search for a new monarch, but as a stage in an ongoing historical process, designed to balance forces and harmonize judgments of competing, but cooperating, men and women. The country's film archives constitute a part of the national memory which it would be foolish to ignore.

What sorts of modules would be needed to produce this historical context? Nothing particularly obscure. A series of modules explaining the history and structure of public decision-making on a variety of matters: war and peace, economics, human rights, crime and punishment, definitions of technological progress, campaign practices, political procedures, the Presidency. Clips would show what Americans had argued for on these issues in the recent and distant part, what they had at various stages decided and with what consequences, how the decisions had been arrived at, what Americans perceive as the most important issues at present, and what leading candidates and commentators are saying now—and have said in the past—about the issues. This may sound like a tall order, but even so little as a total hour or two of such information spread over a convention week would help to show the convention in a clearer light.

And so, without altering its basic convention format or committing a tremendous amount of money, a network could add clarity, interest, and historical perspective to its coverage.

One might stop here with a description of the advantages of the sort of modular montage system I have been describing. But

at the risk of frightening away or offending professional journalists, it must be added that the system here described could go one step further, and permit network commentators to become critics, in the best sense, of the convention, its participants, and its manner of reaching and implementing decisions. The critical function I am proposing would not simply be an array of negative observations on the shortcomings of various politicians, but it would try to open ongoing political reality to historical scrutiny. For instance, a candidate would not simply be asked what he thought about such-and-such an issue, but a film would show the evolution of his thought on the issue and give him time to explain how he arrived at his present view. That view would then be contrasted with that of his opponents, each of whom would also be treated in the same way. The object of this exercise would be to give viewers information that might contribute both to choice-making and to a sense that on many issues no simple slogan is sufficient to describe the evolution of a candidate's approach to an ongoing concern.

My purpose here is not to describe the modular program in detail but to sketch the way it would operate and indicate its advantages as an addition to the current very high quality of convention journalism. But I do not entertain high hopes that the scheme will ever be put into use. I have tried to present the idea where it might be used, and that has not worked. The justification for discussing such a plan in a journal is surely not that it may catch the eye of CBS News. No, in this context the proposal may be more useful as a perspective from which to examine current television journalism, or as a metaphor for a new direction in media theory.

IV

Everything that has been proposed up to this point amounts to a criticism of current methods of reporting political conventions—and by analogy other such events—by the major networks. In none of this is it my intention to attack the motives or even the competence of the various people who report the conventions. But I have argued that the current *format* for convention reporting encourages a harmful view of American politics as nothing more than an unseemly scrambling for power. The scramble exists, it's true, and needs to be reported. But there is something more to the story, something missing partly because the choices that have been made about formats for reporting create a view of social reality that amounts almost to an ideology—what we might call videology.

When I discussed the proposal to add archival materials to the montage mix for political conventions, some of my colleagues objected that such a plan violated the nature of the medium itself. Television they said, as opposed to film, was technologically and, by extension, ontologically tied to immediacy. It is of no small importance that such theoretical, even aesthetic, judgments are exactly parallel to the best journalistic opinion. As of now, the highest standards of television journalism, both as a matter of competence and as a matter of ethics, seem to require that from all the events of the ongoing *present* the anchorman will select the most important and pass them along to us as objectively as possible. I want to argue that both the media theorist and the "objective" reporter are misled.

First the objective reporter. There is no question here about his ideals or competence, but simply of the context in which he works. It is possible, perhaps, to report objectively about a fire, a harvest, or even an election. But a political conventinn is largely a pseudo-event, in the special sense that much of what the journalist reports is created so that he can report it. It is for this reason that simple reportorial objectivity, if it were strictly adhered to, would reduce the network to a passive channel for the rhetoric being created by various politicians. To avoid the problem thus posed, television does in fact take a step backwards and create a hard-news story about the convention, mythologizing it as a struggle for power in a carnival midway full of political sideshows. The reports are serious, because the reporters are serious men, but the net effect of their reports is to accept the carnival for what it seems to be — and to miss much of the political reality that can be shown only in a larger perspective. To place the convention in the frankly interpretive mode described in this proposal would not destroy objectivity — it would simply provide a larger objective context.

The objections raised by media theorists depend upon the argument that television, as opposed to film, gives us immediacy as opposed to history. The essence of television, this argument goes, is live television. But this argument has flaws. First, because television does have its own technological memory, through videotape. In addition, the argument that cutting in time is not suitable to television, since television is instantaneous, is misleading. Television already cuts in space and hence alters our ordinary sense of the *duration* of time. We do not have to sit through any ongoing event, but can cut from, say, a platform speech to a caucus or a commercial. Time is thus frag-

mented as space is bound together. The montage I propose here would not lead to any further fragmentation but to time binding.

It is also misleading to argue that the cutting scheme proposed here would force television to imitate film. The plan proposed is a radical departure from current practice, in that it would provide for a cut from time present to time past, but such a departure is not contrary to the nature of television as a medium. In film a cut from one time to another is always a cut from a time past to another time past. Even a film like Resnais' *Night and Fog*, which explores the relation of time past to the time of filming, is an artifact of the past by the time it is shown to the audience. But television can cut from an actual present to the past, opening up possibilities for a new sense of history as ongoing

All theoretical arguments that a medium determines its content are likely to come to grief when followed to their extremes, and so it is with the claim that television's essence is immediacy, or the claim that pure film tends towards pure, indeterminate, fortuitous physical reality.[13] Television, like film but with unique possibilities of its own, is a medium not so much determined by an essence but gifted with a unique capacity to create relations in space and time, relations which in turn invite largely unexplored aesthetic and rhetorical responses. A medium like television invites us to seek new relations, not philosophical absolutes.

But having argued that television can create special relations between past and present, I also want to say a word about the neglected possibilities of immediacy on television. Television has been particularly negligent in exploiting the aesthetics of duration. Truly experimental television would devote a channel or two of its eighty-channel capacity to abstract video art. Other channels would carry uninterrupted coverage of government meetings, sporting events, schools, and community activities. During a political convention, one channel would carry complete live coverage of the podium — speeches, roll calls, and all. This might pave the way for truly experimental documentary television in the present tense. The logical successor to *American Family* is continuous, live coverage of somebody's living room, street corner, or war around the clock.

There is another objection to the plan here proposed. A revolutionary who is fed up with the system would be likely to argue that current convention coverage exposes the whole process of American politics as a fraud. To put the convention into an

historical context, while it might encourage damaging reflections about some current political leaders, might tend on the whole to reinforce the system by establishing its historical roots — hence, its legitimacy. The objection is probably accurate, and it emphasizes the choice that needs to be made. But in my view it is desirable to employ the media to sustain the process and the image of shared decision-making as legitimate and to encourage reform where necessary. The same answer, of course, would have to be made to politicians who would prefer that the public did not exercise its historical memory or observe too closely the process of politics.[14]

Of course, we are not going to solve the nation's problems by designing a new way to broadcast political conventions. It may be that gavel-to-gavel coverage already puts too great a strain on the convention as a political vehicle. Perhaps instead of worrying about how to combat the ill effects of the convention itself we should be proposing that the government pay for cable television transmission of the Senate and House of Representatives, both in full session and in important committee meetings. Cable television also makes possible two way transmission. We can broadcast, within the limits imposed by mass population, open debate rather than professionally staged political spectacle. And instead of reforming campaign abuses by donating public money directly to candidates, what if the government bought for each candidate a certain number of hours of television time, to be used for speeches, debates, discussions, and interviews? America may need to see more debate rather than improved coverage of what may only look like debate. A democracy needs debate, and no single image-event can be expected to satisfy the need. With more widespread debate we can remind ourselves that not even debate can be expected to solve all our problems. Television can help to promote both high standards and reasonable expectations.

From this series of reflections and proposals several points need to be underscored. Television networks, for all their sensitivity to criticism and high standards of workmanship, are not particularly open to new proposals. Current television journalism, though not consciously biased, does promote a mythical world view that amounts to what I have called a videology. A plan to modify current television reporting of political conventions, and similar events, by allowing a director to cut to montage elements from the past, could help to restore to American politics a sense of historical context and emphasize the legitimacy of rhetorical

conflict. Such proposals as this, even if they are offered only as fantasies, allow media theorists to develop a sense of medium as metaphor for social reality, as a way of coping with the gap between what is possible and what we believe to be probable.

FOOTNOTES

[1]*Vital Speeches of the Day*, 36 (Dec. 1, 1969), p. 99.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 100.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 101.

[4]Fred W. Friendly, *Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control* (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 168-171.

[5]Lloyd Bitzer and Edwin Black, eds., *The Prospect of Rhetoric* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 217.

[6]Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

[7]On politics as a religion, see Murray Edelman, *Politics as Symbolic Action* (Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1971), and *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1964).

[8]Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 2nd ed. (1959; rpt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 324.

[9]"We ask of any model of social action: does it deal with disorder and conflict as normal to agreement or are they reduced to 'imbalance' or heresy?" Hugh Dalziel Duncan, "The Need for Clarification in Social Models of Rhetoric," Bitzer and Black, eds., *The Prospect of Rhetoric*, pp. 140, 147.

[10]This narrative of my correspondence should be read, of course, not only as an indictment of television's closed system of program development but also as a possible motive for what some readers will interpret as my resentment of the networks. No critic like a scholar scorned?

[11]It is now feasible, for instance, to store and retrieve images by video tape and computer. See Paul Ekman, Wallace V. Friesen, and Thomas G. Taussig, "VID- R and SCAN: Tools and Methods for the Automated Analysis of Visual Records," George Gerbner, *et. al.*, eds., *The Analysis of Communication Content* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1969), pp. 297-312.

[12]"Conventions tend to become not national caucuses of politicians, but public spectacles, designed less for deliberation (or dealing) among the participants than the delight (or entertainment) of an audience. It is at least debatable whether this makes the event itself more sober or merely more contrived. . . . It is equally debatable whether the effect upon the audience is one of visual education, in a serious sense, or one of visual enjoyment just a notch or two above the level of the peepshow." Emmet John Hughes, "The Impact of TV on American Politics," Fredric Rissover and David C. Birch, eds., *Mass Media and the Popular Arts* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), pp. 145-147.

[13]Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

[44] Political conventions "have been a shambles of democratic malfunction since their inception, and printed reports through the years haven't had much effect in reforming them. But now that the voters have been taken to them by television, have sat through the sessions with the delegates and seen the political establishment operate to suppress rather than develop the democratic dialogue, there is a stronger reform movement than ever before, and the chances of success seem brighter." Walter Cronkite, "What It's Like to Broadcast News," Francis and Ludmila Voelker, eds., *Mass Media* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), p. 228.